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ABSTRACT

This document summarizes the interview responses of school superintendents and administrators in 19 K-12 school districts in Wisconsin. The administrators were asked ten questions about educational planning and evaluation issues, needs, and accomplishments in their districts. The respondents indicated a need for improved administrative practices, increased planning capability, and better goal development. The interviews identified certain common problems and trends in local school administration, such as tight budgets and loss of local school district autonomy. (DS)

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Educational Planning And Evaluation: A Local District Perspective

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Barbara Thompson, Ph.D., State Superintendent

EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND EVALUATION: A LOCAL DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

By
Tom Stefonek, Ph.D.

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EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND EVALUATION: A LOCAL DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

The topics of educational planning and educational evaluation have received considerable attention in the past decade, but often the discussions and debates have been somewhat removed from the practical realities of the daily world of local district administrators, school boards, and teachers. This publication provides an opportunity to examine planning and evaluation issues, needs, viewpoints, and accomplishments in school districts. Hopefully, it will stimulate additional discussion and purposeful action at the district level, and will also serve to advise other organizations and agencies of the reality that exists in school districts, as perceived by local respondents.

This publication is based upon responses by school district administrators to a series of ten questions submitted by the DPI Bureau of Planning and Evaluation. A listing of the districts included is provided on page two and the questions asked in each district are shown on page three.

District administrators were contacted by letter in the Fall of 1975 and the purposes and procedures of the study were explained. The ten questions were provided for their advance information and to solicit suggestions for changes in the items to be asked.

Interviews were held in the 19 participating districts during late 1975 and early 1976. In seventeen districts, the superintendent was the respondent; in one district the superintendent and four additional administrative staff members participated; and in one district, the superintendent did not participate, but designated four administrative personnel to respond for the district. With three exceptions, all interviews were tape recorded. Extensive notes were made during all interviews, which ranged from 50 minutes to 90 minutes in length.

Appreciation is expressed to all the local district participants who were willing to share their experiences and thoughts through this survey with others statewide who are also active participants in the public educational system.

Districts Included In the Survey

Nineteen K-12 school districts were selected to participate in this study. Nine districts were selected from the 2,000 pupils or less enrollment category, five from the 2,000-5,000 enrollment category, and five districts were selected from the 5,000 or more pupil enrollment category. All CESA regions were represented by one district.

The districts included in the study are shown below:

Under 2,000 Pupils K-12 Enrollment

District	*CESA*
Clinton	18
Marathon City	7
Minong	4
Park Falls	2
Pembine	3
Pewaukee	16
Prairie du Chien	14
Viroqua	11
Waunakee	15

2,000-5,000 Pupils K-12 Enrollment

District	*CESA*
Ashwaubenon	9
Beaver Dam	13
Brown Deer	19
Menomonie	5
Portage	12

5,000 or More Pupils K-12 Enrollment

District	*CESA*
Beloit	17
Eau Claire	6
Oshkosh	8
Sheboygan	10
Superior	1

Survey Questions

The following questions were asked in each of the participating districts. It should be noted that the terms "planning" and "evaluation" were not specifically defined in this study. Rather, each respondent integrated them as he felt appropriate within the context of his district's activities and needs.

1. Based on your total *past* local district experiences, are there particular areas of school district operation and programming which you feel have the greatest need for improved planning and evaluation services and capabilities?
2. At the *present* time, are there areas of *this district's* operation and/or programming which you believe could be served more usefully, from a decision-making viewpoint, by improved planning and evaluation activities?
3. Looking ahead to 1980, do you see any new trends, demands, or issues developing which will have implications for local districts in terms of their planning and evaluation capabilities?
4. Are there particular examples you can cite in which your district was unable to respond adequately to important needs or issues because adequate planning and/or evaluation capabilities did not exist, or were not properly utilized?
5. Are there any specific examples of success, improvement, or modification in your district's operation which can be attributed to local planning and evaluation efforts?
6. Is your community and your school board as concerned with evaluation, effectiveness, productivity, etc. as the popular press and professional literature suggest?
7. Has your district made any specific efforts within the past several years to improve your planning and evaluation capabilities?
8. Is there anything that can or should be done at the local, CESA, or DPI levels to assist and improve local planning and evaluation efforts and capabilities?
9. If a "planner" and/or an "evaluator" were added to your staff today, what 3-5 priority assignments and responsibilities would they be assigned?
10. What do you believe are the major obstacles to incorporating a planning and evaluation function in your district? Cite at least two, if possible.

Note to the Reader

Throughout the reading of this publication, it is important to remember open-ended questions were asked of the respondents and a great variety of answers were received, not all of equal priority or relevance.

In the analysis, therefore, it was necessary to try to group similar or related responses into some meaningful categories. Many times, the same responses were worded in different ways, just as in many instances multiple responses to a question were provided without noting their degree of priority or significance.

It is also important to note the lack of structured responses to choose from means that not all respondents thought of the same possible responses. For example, a number of administrators expressed opinions about the continued loss of local autonomy and the changing role they perceived DPI to be playing. If this question had been directly asked of all respondents with some structured responses provided, it would have elicited a greater number of opinions than were volunteered by the participants. The study was intended to provide a forum for local viewpoints, however, without forcing responses to specific questions, i.e., whatever was of greatest local interest was intended to be heard rather than determining in advance what areas would be explored. It is important, therefore, that readers do not "read in" more than actually exists or that generalizations beyond the limited number of respondents be carelessly developed.

Responses

The open-ended questions used in the survey resulted in a wide variety of answers from respondents. Because of this unstructured response pattern, it is not possible to use a consistent analysis format for all ten questions. Instead, each is presented in a way that seems reasonable in light of the question itself and the responses received. Hopefully, this procedure is acceptable in view of the fact the study was intended to provide a forum for local views, not to "prove" certain points nor to statistically test predetermined hypotheses. In many instances, the responses received were not appropriate for quantitative analysis. However, major themes or patterns which were expressed by the respondents are noted. Multiple responses were given to many questions by many respondents so total responses may exceed the number of districts surveyed.

Question 1: "Based on your total past local district experiences, are there particular areas of school district operation and programming which you feel have the greatest need for improved planning and evaluation services and capabilities?"

Responses to this item clustered around the following major areas:

- Improved administrative/management practices (15 responses).
  This category received a variety of responses including the need for improved public relations; better budgeting procedures; meaningful local research; more "creative" management; improved policy formulation; and "educating" of local school boards.

- Improved/increased planning capability and the development of more clearly defined goals and objectives (13 responses).
  Administrators indicated to some degree the programs of the schools have increased rapidly into many new areas based on pressures from within the district, but generally this has not occurred within the context of a planned pattern and direction of expansion that is related to well-defined purposes of the schools and major goals and objectives that have been carefully developed.

- Curriculum evaluation, expansion and improvement (10 responses).
  Respondents cited these areas of deficiency in comments often related to the statement above regarding planned growth and a stronger goals orientation. The main theme was that it is often difficult to describe the effectiveness of the schools' programs because they have not been evaluated in any systematic, sustained manner that is related to agreed upon outcomes or results.

- Inadequate measures of staff productivity and effectiveness (9 responses).
  The need for increased attention to staff evaluation and better ways to address this complex problem was a frequent comment. Administrators were very aware of the political problems associated with more and better staff evaluation, but also felt the need exists throughout the public school system.

- A variety of other responses were received regarding deficiencies in the public school system, including the need for better staff inservice programs (3 responses); better evaluation of the graduates of the

schools (4 responses); evaluation of school support services (2 responses); and other areas such as greater control over the program offered; improved scheduling; better VTAE coordination and total program development for all students, which were cited by one respondent.

Question 2: "At the present time, are there areas of *this district's* operation and/or programming which you believe could be served most usefully, from a decision-making viewpoint, by improved planning and evaluation activities?"

- Curriculum evaluation, improvement, and expansion (15 responses). A majority of the respondents felt an inadequate job is currently being done in their district in evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum and systematically improving and expanding course offerings. While most respondents indicated positive curricular change has occurred in their opinion, there was a feeling of inadequacy regarding the curriculum evaluation process and some reservations as to whether simply adding more courses was always in the best interests of the students.

- Improved management/administrative capabilities (14 responses). Specific areas of need mentioned in this group of responses included improved budget development and monitoring processes, including PPBS; better local planning procedures; and increased information retrieval capabilities, including computer usage.

- Staff evaluation and improvement (7 responses). Based on expressions of need, as well as examples given describing what is being done at the local level, it is evident inservice program improvement and locally developed staff evaluation procedures and materials are areas of considerable interest and activity. Administrators indicated these are activities that require considerable effort and involvement by teachers, administrators, and school boards if positive change is to result.

- Goals and priorities development (6 responses). Approximately one-third of the respondents indicated a strong local need to develop district educational goals and priorities so limited resources can be allocated in areas that are the most logical and appropriate in view of the school's role and community expectations.

Question 3: "Looking ahead to 1980, do you see any new trends, demands, or issues developing which have implications for local districts in terms of their planning and evaluation capabilities?"

The varied responses to this item were grouped, after completion of the interviews, into the following major categories:

Management/Administrative Considerations (41 responses).
Responses in this grouping included observations related to: Title IX (Education Amendments of 1972); continued increased costs at the local level; increased teacher negotiations implications; problems associated with declining/increasing enrollments; local pressures to control school expenditures; greater justification of new programs and costs; teacher evaluation; and community involvement in school related matters.

Educational Program Considerations (23 responses).
Responses in this group referred to: renewed emphasis on basic skills; increased emphasis on career/job preparation; services for preschool handicapped children; drug and alcohol abuse instruction; expanded adult education programs; programs for gifted students; alternatives to existing high school programs; and preschool education program development.

In addition to the specific areas indicated above, respondents in ten (10) districts said they expected continued state and national demands to be placed upon them and further erosion of the autonomy of local districts within the next five years.

Question 4: "Are there specific examples you can cite in which your district was unable to respond adequately to important needs or issues because adequate planning and/or evaluation capabilities did not exist or were not properly utilized?"

Local personnel identified the following as areas in which they were not satisfied with local performance:

- Specialized curricular areas, e.g., health, safety, handicapped programs, gifted programs (14 responses).

- Inadequate administrative procedures, e.g., lack of local planning; lack of personnel evaluation systems; inadequate budgeting procedures; etc. (13 responses).

- Providing adequate school facilities (8 responses).

Question 5: "Are there any specific examples of success, improvement or modification in your district's operation which can be attributed to local planning and evaluation efforts?"

The great variety of answers to this item have been grouped into three major categories. Because some responses could logically fall into either of several groups, a number of examples are provided:

Educational Program Development (37 responses).
This category included such activities as learning centers (K-5); career education program development; handicapped children services; new procedures for curriculum development; IGE in grades 6-8; computer usage; vocational education program development; and curriculum guides work.

Staff Development and Involvement (24 responses).
This grouping included improved inservice programs; better staff meetings; evaluation systems for certificated personnel; procedures for faculty participation and feedback; and improved supervisory procedures.

Administrative/Managerial Areas (22 responses).
Responses in this group included new compensation plans for middle management personnel; MBO systems for administrative staff; development of job descriptions; creation of department heads in the high school; local needs assessments; management uses of the computer; goal setting; improved ancillary services; school board inservice activities; and site and facilities planning.

Question 6: "Is your community and your school board as concerned with evaluation, effectiveness, productivity, etc. as the popular press and professional literature suggest?"

- In three (3) districts, respondents indicated there was a great local concern with effectiveness and accountability. In thirteen (13)

districts, respondents indicated there was no unusual concern about such topics. In the other three (3) districts, the respondents indicated a high, but normal, level of interest. Ten administrators, after indicating there was no unusual level of interest, pointed out there is a general, continuous concern in the community however, but it was not visibly increased in the recent past.

- Respondents in five districts said their school boards were very interested in better teacher evaluation. Board concerns regarding administrative productivity and evaluation were mentioned in three districts. Administrators tended to feel the "accountability crunch" was happening to other superintendents in unspecified distant districts, but not to them.

Question 7: "Has your district made any specific efforts within the past several years to improve your planning and evaluation capabilities?"

The following responses were received:

- Improved administrative planning, including improved budgeting systems, local needs assessment studies and new positions added with planning responsibilities (23 responses).

- Increased staff and community involvement (12 responses).

- Improved staff inservice programs and staff evaluation procedures, including administrative MBO systems (10 responses).

- Improved curriculum development and curriculum evaluation procedures (9 responses).

Question 8: "Is there anything that can or should be done at the local, CESA, or DPI levels to assist and improve local planning and evaluation efforts and abilities?"

- Fourteen respondents said DPI should provide research, planning and evaluation information, models, and services to LEAs as is currently done or in increased amounts. Two respondents specifically mentioned DPI curriculum guides development as very helpful assistance at the local level. Five respondents expressed concern that DPI is returning to a regulatory, supervisory role and

relationship regarding local districts, and this was viewed as a very undesirable change.

- Five respondents said CESAs should serve as resources for local districts, but there was general recognition among administrators that the nature of the CESAs does not enable them to provide extensive technical or consultative service in the areas of planning and evaluation unless LEAs are willing and able to support such staff at the regional level. This was not stated as a criticism of the CESAs, but as a recognition of their problems of funding personnel for such purposes.

In evaluating local efforts, administrators expressed an awareness of local inadequacies, but also felt that there have been many areas of progress in recent years and they are doing the best job possible within the fiscal and personnel constraints they must live with.

Question 9: "If a planner and/or evaluator were added to your staff today, what 3-5 priority assignments and responsibilities would they be assigned?"

This question was intended to reveal the immediate priorities held at the local level in areas of planning and evaluation. The following responses were received:

- Curriculum evaluation and planning (14 responses).
- Long range planning, needs assessment and "applied research" (14 responses).
- Inservice planning and evaluation and staff evaluation (9 responses).
- Management planning (MIS development, PPBS development, community relations planning and evaluation, etc.) (9 responses).

Question 10: "What do you believe are the major obstacles to incorporating a planning and evaluation function in your district?"

- Lack of administrative time and personnel (11 responses).
- Lack of board commitment and staff resistance (10 responses).

- Financial costs of planning and evaluation (10 responses).
- Uncertainty of ability of results and findings (8 responses).
- Lack of effective models for local use (7 responses).

Comments

During the nineteen interviews that were held, the conversations ranged over a wide variety of subjects, some of which were not captured or reflected in the ten survey questions. Some of these are presented below. In some instances, these are the opinions of only one person, while in other cases they represent what appears to be a prevailing viewpoint of the respondents.

- Many administrators expressed frustration regarding the number and variety of demands and pressures they must respond to on a daily basis. These activities, while important to the routine operation of the district, often become so time consuming there is no time available to devote to higher level planning and evaluation work. Coupled with inadequate or nonexistent budgets for such purposes and what is viewed as a lack of administrative personnel, the no time—no money—no people situation makes it difficult for many districts to do more than is currently being done.

- Facilities still rank high among local needs as perceived by the respondents, and there is general agreement that enrollments will rise again within five years or so. Many administrators are skeptical of school census figures for their district based on past experience. Efforts to correct facilities inadequacies are not generally well received by district residents who tend to believe enrollments are dropping and pressures are off the buildings for the forseeable future.

- Accountability demands by school boards and the general public were found to be at a relatively low level in the majority of the districts involved. There is considerable interest, however, in the evaluation of teachers and administrators, and there were enough management MBO systems cited to suggest this is becoming fairly widespread in the state.

- It appears the schools have "opened up" in recent years in many of the districts surveyed. This is indicated by the number of times school

councils, citizen advisory committees, public relations efforts, community based needs assessments, and improved faculty participation were cited by respondents.

- There appears to be general agreement that in the next five years budgets will be tight; innovation and change may face more resistance; per pupil costs will continue to rise, especially in view of expanded high-cost handicapped children services; there will be more emphasis on basic academic programs and vocational/career preparation; and state and federal requirements will probably influence local operations more than local decisions will.

- It is difficult for DPI consultants to remain truely well informed about and sensitive to local needs, problems, and conditions after a period of employment in the state agency. Regardless of how conscientious and competent these individuals may be, it is difficult to understand and appreciate the local district world of reality after being out of it for a period of years.

- There is a real need to examine the productivity of personnel employed in local districts. There is a great deal of wasted time and effort both in the classrooms and in other areas of district operation. An attitude of laxity has developed to some extent which hurts the total effort.

- The basic academic program should have greater control exercised over it, both in content and methodology, so there is a greater assurance that minimal educational expectations of the local community are being met.

- The great amount of innovation and experimentation in the past decade has been beneficial in general, but in some instances, this has been accomplished at a cost to some pupils who have been subjected to unproved methodologies and materials.

- The disintegration or redefinition/restructuring of the family which is now occurring is going to result in increased problems and costs for the schools because of the presence of larger numbers of psychologically-damaged or troubled children who have been exposed to undesirable home situations. Treatment of such children will require expensive, specialized personnel.

- Local district autonomy, or what is left of it, is being lost by the public to the professional educators. Administrators/school boards on one hand and teacher unions on the other are struggling over questions of power and authority and the lay community is being by-passed in the process. The gradual, annual erosion of school board power is reducing the influence of the public in their schools and replacing it with professional educational viewpoints.

- The current trend of the DPI toward becoming a regulatory and supervisory agency in response to legislative pressures and mandates is perceived as a very unfortunate situation. The cooperative professional partnership between LEAs and the DPI is being threatened, some respondents believe, and this will be bad for the public school system if it continues or increases. There is also some feeling among local administrators that DPI does not have an effective influence on the legislature and significant educational decisions are made without adequate departmental involvement.

- The "administrative team" concept appears to be well established in the majority of districts included in the survey. Some superintendents included central office staff and building principals in the interviews, while others shared the questions in advance with such persons to provide for a greater variety of opinions and additional information to be shared. Several superintendents cited the use of regularly scheduled administrative meetings with principals and central office staff as an indication of improved internal planning procedures.

- Approximately one-fourth of the respondents indicated there are considerations related to schoolboards which should be noted. These included the difficulty of keeping boards well informed regarding the state and federal requirements that must be met; the fine line that often exists between policy formulation and administrative/management functions; and the problems of working with board members who are elected on a single issue or have a very narrow interest in only one small area of district operation and lack a broad view and understanding of the total educational process. Superintendents who discussed these areas generally felt, however, they had good boards to work with, but there exists a need for more inservice education for many board members.